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Topic: The Meaning of Freedom

The Meaning of Freedom

What is freedom? The online dictionary defines freedom as the power or right to act, speak or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint.

Everyone wants to be free, to be able to make our own choices and execute an action of our own choosing. It grants us great relief and satisfaction to be free and not caged in by what other people deem to be right, good or best for us. We hunger and thirst to venture out into the real world and to rendezvous with destiny without others hovering over us to stop us from making harsh choices and mistakes. They mean well, but most of the time we only learn from our mistakes after getting burnt from playing with fire. It disgusts us to be controlled like puppets, limiting what we are supposed to do, or used and manipulated for another's gain.

As humans, it is our nature to seek after what we want without other people withholding it from us. If they do, we tend to rebel against their will or intentions, both good and bad. As a teenager, the tendency to strive not to be imprisoned by what others have in mind for me flows through my veins, and the youthfulness of my conscience only pushes my adrenaline to do what I want to do. In reality, the power of self-determination, self-love, and the constant need to be free from the chains of our generation is what drives most teenagers to rebel and oppose.

For starters, most teenagers, not unlike yours truly, always want to have the freedom to travel. This group of youths caught this 'disease' known as wanderlust and are seized with this groundbreaking desire to travel and be free in the world. I think that by travelling we get to cast away all our cares and responsibilities for awhile and take a break, a vacation to unwind and loosen up. But, oftentimes parents are too worried to allow us to travel to some place far away from home. All we wish is to have some time alone to discover the world as it is. How intriguing it is to just be able to go to an airport and randomly select a destination, to be all set to explore, to try out new exotic food and meet new people from different parts of the world? This freedom is scarce and not easily given out, but it does feel inhumane, as if our mind is telling us that it is wrong to be tamed from the inside. Something deep and wild within us craves freedom. It drives a person to seek after the truth of life, to travel and see the world with new pairs of eyes.

The question, "*Where is my freedom?*" is always asked by teenagers while going through life because we desire to prove to our parents that we are able to think and look after our own selves. Teenagers are always a couple of years more mature than their parents think they are, and a couple of years less mature than they themselves think they are. Teenagers have to make some hard choices when dealing with their parents' will for them, whether to agree and accept that what they think is always best for us, or to oppose when it seems that there is another solution. It scares us to admit it, but the sole reason we rebel and go against what our parents instruct us to do is to prove a point, which is we are not afraid of dealing with the consequences. We want the whole world to know that we, though young and fresh, can also be strong and independent. We can handle the liberty given to us and, at the same time, be able to exercise self-control over it.

Other than the freedom to be our own person, we also yearn for the freedom from labels that people put on us. We wish to surpass the stereotypes deemed for young adults for we should be the ones to make that decision ourselves. Everyone sees what you appear to be, but only a few actually experience and know who you really are. That is why most teenagers make every effort to express their originality, what they really are, through art, music and even in their style of dressing.

Furthermore, schools provide the youths of our country the freedom to excel. That is why I truly believe that schools are essential to develop a child's mind: so that they are given the freedom to achieve excellence and learn from their mistakes. In Malaysia, our government ensures that every child is entitled to free education (public schools) at the age of seven until seventeen, so that they have the freedom to obtain basic education and excel in life. To that effect, financially-able parents can also opt to send their children to private or international schools.

There is also freedom of religion. This includes freedom to change religion or not to follow any religion at all. People are given the liberty to practise their faith peacefully without being persecuted by the government or the rulers of the country. They are free to choose whether to be a Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh or even an atheist. In Malaysia, only those that are born of Malay bloodline are required to be Muslims, practicing Islam as their faith and religion. But, the Malaysian government permits others to profess their faith in any other sect besides the official religion.

Next is the freedom of speech, which is the freedom to have a voice in the community. I strongly agree when Ian McCallum said that, "*Freedom of speech is not simply a freedom to think and say what you wish, but to speak for yourself, to speak from the heart, and to be accountable for your words.*" This freedom should not be abused, but it is to help justify the wrongly accused and save the lives of those oppressed. This

freedom makes the people feel like they have a voice, especially in a democratic nation like Malaysia.

People should be granted the freedom to live their lives by how they want them to be, and not by what others want or think is best for them. In other words, they should be able to make their own mistakes and to pick themselves up when they fall. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, *"Freedom is not worth having if it does not include the freedom to make mistakes."* Yes, indeed we must have the freedom to be able to give life a shot, encounter failures and make some mistakes for nothing gets embedded more in our memory than the bittersweet taste of failure and costly mistakes. As such, we will instinctively remember and learn from the follies of our youth.

Freedom can also mean being free from the past, mostly to be free from fear and bondages. This freedom promotes new beginnings. Ex-convicts that are remorseful over what they have done and are truly turned from their ways strive to be better people than they were before and not the monsters that other people fear they still are. Everyone deserves a second chance, maybe even a third or fourth, as we are not perfect beings but we are learning and improving everyday to become better individuals.

For my country, Malaysia, freedom means being free from political and economical colonisation – the freedom to run and lead the country by our own people. It means being free to have a clear vision and mission to develop the country. We would not want to be oppressed by foreign nations or other economic powers, but rather to be independent enough to stand on our own. We want to be able to defend our own country and create a psychologically liberated, secure and developed society, as stated as one of the challenges in the idealistic Malaysian Vision 2020.

The people need their freedom.

Freedom to express how and what we truly feel.

Freedom to love those we truly treasure.

Freedom to do the right thing for the right reason at the right time.

Freedom to be treated as an equal despite racial or age differences.

Freedom to make a difference in life despite being rich or poor.

For with freedom, comes love, hope and happiness.

I believe as part of the human race, we are all connected.

To set one another free is to set ourselves free.